

Dear Governor-Elect Moore and Lt. Governor-Elect Miller,

We are excited to work with you this decade towards a cleaner and more equitable transportation future that enhances opportunity for all Marylanders. This requires a focus on public transit – including rail, bus and paratransit projects statewide – as well as active transportation and micromobility options so households can access jobs, housing, health care, and educational opportunities without having to own multiple cars. And it requires a focus on transportation demand management – to optimize efficiency by building on the recent widespread growth in telework and staggered/flexible work schedules.

Perhaps counterintuitively, however, our biggest focus should be roads – not building new ones, but making the most effective and efficient use of those we’ve already built. This is why we need a State Highway Administrator unlike any other in Maryland’s history, one who is committed to changing that crucial modal administration so it transforms our road network into a 21st century resource for all Marylanders.

Maryland is crisscrossed by more than 31,000 roadway miles including ones owned wholly or in part by MDOT SHA. State-owned roads are disproportionately important, carrying nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the state’s vehicle traffic.

Are those roads transit-ready so we can move more people using them? Are they safely designed to provide opportunities for pedestrians, wheelchair users, and bicyclists to reach their daily destinations? Retrofitting our transportation system so that it’s more transit-friendly, safer, and more accessible to all users is a dire need in Maryland.

First, this approach will help to reduce vehicle-miles-of-travel, which has rebounded since plummeting in 2020. Second, according to the Annual Attainment Report on Transportation System Performance, in 2021 more than 46,000 bikers and pedestrians were injured on our roads in 2021 and 146 were killed in 2020. The injury rate per 100 million miles traveled has not improved over the past decade, and the number of pedestrian fatalities has consistently increased. The State Highway Administration must take seriously Maryland’s statutory commitment to Vision Zero and address our transportation safety crisis.

Our road conditions need to be better. Given historic federal investments in the massive bipartisan infrastructure law, SHA should raise the preferred maintenance condition goal to 100 percent by 2030. According to the Attainment Report on Transportation System Performance, the preferred maintenance condition of the SHA highway network has hovered around 85 percent for the past decade, consistent with the goal for SHA. We can do better.

The new State Highway Administrator will have resources to retrofit our road system so it is transit-ready and safe for active transportation and to eliminate deferred maintenance and bring it all up to a state of good repair. As MDOT announced in September, “For the six years of the Draft FY 2023-2028 CTP, Maryland has programmed \$1.3 billion in “new” IJA federal formula funding: \$178 million for airports, \$166 million for transit and \$966 million for highways.”

This funding can be used to repair the existing system and MDOT also has the latitude to “flex” federal funding towards alternatives to roadbuilding, since the \$966 million for highways is doled out by formula, mostly from two programs (the National Highway Performance Program and the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program) which Congress has made more and more flexible over the years. Their funding can now also be used at a state’s discretion for:

- Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure
- Transit
- Electric charging infrastructure
- Ferries
- Traffic management
- Road safety improvements

Additionally, the State Highway Administration already plays a key role in funding active transportation infrastructure through its administration of the federal Transportation Alternatives program and state programs such as the Bicycle and Sidewalk Retrofit and ADA Retrofit programs. In recent years, Maryland has had unique difficulty in utilizing the full amount of its Transportation Alternatives resources, not due to a lack of worthy projects, but a lack of resources for applying for and administering these grants. The new infrastructure bill allows states to spend up to five percent of Transportation Alternatives funds providing technical assistance to local communities. A visionary State Highway Administrator could change the focus to ensure greater coordination with local government and more effective utilization of these federal grant resources, focused on traditionally underserved communities.

MDOT faces huge challenges and opportunities this decade. There is no modal administration more important than the State Highway Administration, which will determine whether our road system helps to deliver more transportation choices, safer streets, fewer potholes, and better climate and equity outcomes for Marylanders. We urge you to pick a State Highway Administrator who is a change agent committed to repairing and retrofitting our enormous road network to leave no one behind.

Sincerely,

NRDC

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Washington Area Bicyclist Association